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Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 63/154, to transmit to the Assembly the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade.

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Summary

The present report, which follows the reports submitted in 2004 (A/59/267) and 2006 (A/61/151), and the mid-decade review of 2008 (A/63/172), takes as its starting point the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade (A/57/218 and Corr.1). It analyses global and regional literacy trends and presents an assessment of progress in the three priority areas identified through the mid-Decade review, namely: "mobilizing stronger commitment to literacy; reinforcing effective literacy programme delivery; and harnessing new resources for literacy".

The report presents the situations and perspectives of Member States with regard to the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, and documents the impact of the Decade on generating stronger political will, policies and partnerships in favour of literacy, as well as national initiatives, which contribute to the objectives of the Decade. Strategic priorities for the next phase of the Decade and beyond are also outlined.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted by the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in fulfilment of the request by the General Assembly, in its resolution 63/154, that UNESCO, as the United Nations agency charged with the coordination of the United Nations Literacy Decade, submit the next progress report on the implementation of the International Plan of Action to the General Assembly in 2010.

2. The report takes as its starting point the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade and presents an assessment of progress in the three priority areas for the remaining years of the Decade identified through the mid-Decade review (General Assembly resolution 63/154) namely, "mobilizing stronger commitment to literacy, reinforcing effective literacy programme delivery and harnessing new resources for literacy".

3. In 2009, on the basis of the outcomes of the mid-decade review, UNESCO undertook a broad consultation with partners in the United Nations system, civil society, the private sector and Member States to develop the International Strategic Framework for Action for the Decade in order to guide efforts through to the end of 2012. Underscoring the links with the Millennium Development Goals, the Framework states that, ultimately each of the Millennium Development Goals implies a learning process and that literacy is a key condition of autonomous learning, and is thus indispensable for the achievement of the Goals. The international profile of literacy was further raised by the publication, in 2008, of *The Global Literacy Challenge: a profile of youth and adult literacy at the mid-point of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012*.

4. The report presents the situations and perspectives of Member States with regard to the implementation of the objectives of the Decade. Data are drawn from specifically prepared country and regional reports, including reports from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education prepared for the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, the Education for All *Global Monitoring Report 2010* entitled, *Reaching the Marginalized*, the national reports and the synthesis report of the Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Education for All (2010), the 2009 review of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment and UNESCO programme reports.

5. The report also documents national literacy efforts that contribute to the Decade's objectives, while not being directly linked to it.

II. Progress in literacy

A. Key achievements of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2008-2010

6. The key achievements in 2008-2010 relate to the goal of generating stronger political will and greater collective action to promote literacy, giving it a higher profile on the international agendas in education and development. Literacy was highlighted in particular through the following activities.

1. Literacy Initiative for Empowerment

7. The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, coordinated by UNESCO, continues to provide a strategic framework for increased literacy action in the 35 countries where either the literacy rate is less than 50 per cent or where there are more than 10 million non-literate adults. As a key operational mechanism for achieving the goals of the United Nations Literacy Decade, the Initiative serves as a catalyst to strengthen the commitment and capacity of the participating countries for good quality literacy provision and affords a valuable platform for reinforcing South-South cooperation. The Initiative receives significant funding support from the Capacity-building for Education for All Programme run by the Nordic countries.

2. Education for All Global Action Week: April 2009

8. In cooperation with a wide range of civil society partners, in 2009, for the first time, the Global Campaign for Education selected literacy as the theme of the Global Action Week (April 2009), highlighting the need to give much greater attention to the literacy goal of Education for All (Goal 4).[1]

3. Sixth International Conference on Adult Education

9. The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, held in Belém, Brazil in December 2009 was a key event in raising the profile of literacy. Held once every 12 years, the conference took place within both the Education for All movement (2000-2015) and the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), thus strengthening the role of adult literacy in broader educational efforts. The conference reconfirmed literacy as a right and a foundation for lifelong learning and recognized that Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without first reaching Goal 4. All recommended actions that Member States must implement in order to advance literacy were reflected in the Belém Framework for Action, which was adopted by Member States during the final stage of the conference. For the first time, a *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* was produced (see http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/grale/) based on national reports (see http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/national-reports/).

4. Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Education for All: June 2010

10. Fifty-four per cent of the world's total population and 67 per cent of the world's non-literate youth and adults live in the nine high-population countries of the global South, the E-9, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan. It was therefore highly significant that the theme for the 2010 meeting of the nine countries was "Literacy for Development". Deliberations covered planning, funding, programme delivery, monitoring and evaluation in the context of South-South cooperation, and the meeting resulted in a forward-looking agenda for the next three years focusing on mutual learning and support in all areas of literacy promotion, to serve as a catalyst for efforts within and beyond the E-9 countries themselves.

11. In addition, the following sections of the report signal significant progress in clearer and stronger national policies and plans in a number of countries, as well as

[1] Reducing adult illiteracy by 50 per cent by 2015.

an indication of higher budgetary allocations. It also adduces evidence of new partnerships and ongoing innovation in the delivery of literacy programmes, with an emphasis on developing capacity to ensure effective implementation and sustainable impact.

B. Literacy rates

12. The analysis of literacy rates, which is based on the statistics supplied by the Education for All *Global Monitoring Report 2010*, is limited to comparing the periods 1985-1994 and 2000-2007, and data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified. Most data are drawn from national censuses or surveys based on self-declaration, not from direct testing of literacy competence (see also paras. 28-34 below).

1. World literacy rates

13. The number of literate adults has been increasing constantly since 1985. The figure of non-literate adults has dropped from 869 million in the period 1985-1994 to 759 million in 2000-2007, a decrease of 13 per cent. Between the two timespans, the global adult literacy rate grew from 76 per cent to 84 per cent. The largest increase was in the developing countries, where there was a change in the adult literacy rate from 68 per cent to 80 per cent. In the previous report to the General Assembly (A/63/172) the global literacy rate was recorded as 83.6 per cent and the absolute number of non-literate adults (over the age of 15) totalled 774 million. In the present report, the global literacy rate is estimated to be almost unchanged, at 84 per cent, while the absolute number has declined to 759 million. These figures indicate that literacy efforts are hardly keeping pace with population growth, let alone making any significant dent in global literacy rates. However, as indicated below, there are large disparities regionally and nationally. While developing countries are concentrating on raising their adult literacy rates, industrialized countries are facing challenges as well. Many adults in industrialized countries have insufficient functional literacy skills, a factor which impedes their access to jobs or their ability to function well in highly literate environments, where the increasingly ubiquitous use of technology demands ever higher levels of literacy.[2]

2. Regional literacy rates

14. Developing countries are home to 752 million non-literate adults. Statistics for the period 2000-2007 show that the highest concentrations are in countries with large populations: 67 per cent of the total number were located in the E-9 countries, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan.

15. Regional disparities remain high (see table 1). The total adult literacy rate ranges from 62 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa to 99 per cent in Central Asia, North America and Western Europe for the period 2000-2007. The greatest increase in literacy rates was observed in South and West Asia (16 per cent) and the Arab States (13 per cent), followed by sub-Saharan Africa (9 per cent). The overall increase in the rate in developing countries was 12 per cent. Latin America and the Caribbean had an increase of only 4 per cent, although the literacy rate already averaged

[2] See *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010*.

87 per cent in the 1985-1994 period. Great differences between literacy rates remain within the region, ranging from 73 per cent in Guatemala to 99 per cent in Antigua and Barbuda and the Cayman Islands. The intra-regional disparities are extremely marked in sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from below 30 per cent (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger) to over 90 per cent (Seychelles and Zimbabwe). In South and West Asia the growth in the literacy rate has been especially high in Nepal (24 per cent) and in Bangladesh and India (18 per cent). Among the Arab States, Algeria (25 per cent), Egypt and Yemen (22 per cent, respectively) have achieved the greatest increase.

Table 1
Regional literacy rates
(Percentage/weighted value)

	1985-1994			*2000-2007*		
	Total	*M*	*F*	*Total*	*M*	*F*
Arab States	58	70	46	71	80	62
Central and Eastern Europe	96	98	94	98	99	96
Central Asia	98	99	97	99	99	98
East Asia and the Pacific	82	89	75	93	96	91
Latin America/Caribbean	87	88	86	91	92	90
North America/Western Europe	99	99	99	99	100	99
South and West Asia	48	60	34	64	75	53
Sub-Saharan Africa	53	63	45	62	71	54
Worldwide	**76**	**82**	**70**	**84**	**89**	**80**

Source: *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010.*

3. Absolute numbers of non-literates

16. While the absolute number of non-literates worldwide has decreased, there are as many as 21 countries in which the absolute number of non-literates has increased in the 2000-2007 period compared to 1985-1994 (see table 2). Eleven of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa. The rise in the absolute figures of non-literates coincides with a decrease in overall literacy rate in only two countries. In all other countries the absolute number of non-literates increased while the overall literacy rate increased (see table 2). In some cases, the increase in the absolute number of non-literates is very large, indicating that literacy efforts are not keeping pace with population growth.

Table 2
Growth in absolute numbers of non-literate adults

	Adult literacy rates (Percentage)		*Absolute numbers of non-literate adults (In thousands)*		
Country	*1985-1994*	*2000-2007*	*1985-1994*	*2000-2007*	*Increase*
Arab States					
Bahrain	84	89	56	63	7
Egypt	44	66	16 428	16 824	396
Morocco	42	56	9 602	9 816	214
Yemen	37	59	4 686	5 081	395
East Asia and the Pacific					
Philippines	94	93	2 325	3 746	1 421
Viet Nam	88	90	4 789	6 033	1 244
Latin America/Caribbean					
Ecuador	88	84	731	1 413	682
Guatemala	64	73	1 915	2 055	140
Peru	87	90	1 848	1 992	144
South and West Asia					
Bangladesh	35	53	44 458	48 541	4 083
Sub-Saharan Africa					
Benin	27	41	2 131	3 022	891
Burkina Faso	14	29	4 136	5 684	1 548
Central African Republic	34	49	1 085	1 139	54
Chad	12	32	3 177	3 959	782
Côte d'Ivoire	34	49	4 180	4 831	651
Ethiopia	27	36	23 045	27 144	4 099
Liberia	41	56	652	881	229
Rwanda	58	65	1 468	1 491	23
Senegal	27	42	2 964	4 032	1 068
United Republic of Tanzania	59	72	5 217	6 237	1 020
Zambia	65	71	1 541	1 907	366

Source: *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010.*

C. Gender

17. With regard to the world population as a whole, while there is progress in closing the gender gap, which remains large, the literacy gender parity index (GPI) has improved from 0.854 (1985-1994) to 0.899 (2000-2007) worldwide. In terms of the proportion of the total number of non-literate adults worldwide, there was no progress: women accounted for 64 per cent for the period 2000-2007, a slight

increase over the 1985-1994 period (63 per cent). The relationship between literacy and gender is more complex, however, than these figures suggest. In Europe, North America and the Caribbean, educators are concerned about boys' relative lack of achievement in literacy, while gender disparity has all but disappeared in countries with adult literacy rates at 95 per cent or above. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge is the exclusion from education of women and girls in developing countries, where, as a whole, progress has been significant: the literacy gender parity index improved from 0.766 in 1985-1994 to 0.871 in 2000-2007. Some countries have shown impressive growth in female literacy rates. In Nepal, for example, the literacy rate for women increased from 17 per cent (1985-1994) to 44 per cent (2000-2007). Despite this progress, the gender gap remains large in general. It is especially marked in South and West Asia, in sub-Saharan Africa and in two Arab States, as shown in table 3. According to these data, Afghanistan (0.29) and Niger (0.35) face the largest challenge.

Table 3
Gender parity index: countries with the largest disparities

	1985-1994	*2000-2007*
Arab States		
Mauritania	0.52	0.63
Yemen	0.3	0.53
South and West Asia		
Afghanistan		0.29
Bhutan		0.59
Nepal	0.35	0.62
Pakistan		0.59
Sub-Saharan Africa		
Angola		0.65
Benin	0.42	0.53
Burkina Faso	0.42	0.59
Central African Republic	0.42	0.52
Chad		0.48
Côte d'Ivoire	0.53	0.63
Ethiopia	0.51	0.46
Guinea		0.43
Mali		0.52
Mozambique		0.58
Niger		0.35
Senegal	0.48	0.63
Sierra Leone		0.54
Togo		0.56

Source: Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010.

D. Projections 2015

18. Based on the projections in the 2010 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, the global adult literacy rate will reach about 87 per cent in 2015. This corresponds to only a small increase of 3 per cent from 2000-2007. The literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to go up the most by 10 per cent — reaching 72 per cent. While this is slightly better than projected literacy rates in South and West Asia, it is very much behind the projected rates for the other regions. The proportion of women as a percentage of all non-literate adults is expected to decline by only 1 per cent globally. The projected numbers of non-literate youth (ages 15 to 24) are more encouraging: by 2015, they are expected to decrease by 25.5 per cent worldwide, from 125,401,000 to 93,365,000. According to the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, even in a best-case scenario the Dakar goal of halving the overall number of non-literate adults will not be reached by 2015. According to projections, the goal may be achieved only at a level of 50 to 66 per cent. The gaps between the Dakar goal and the projections are the largest for South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States.[3]

III. United Nations Literacy Decade: International Strategic Framework for Action

A. Strategic objective A: To mobilize stronger commitment to literacy

19. Four strategies were spelled out under objective A: advocacy, clear policy formulation, improving assessment, monitoring and evaluation and stronger and more strategic partnerships. In reporting on each of these strategies, the pertinent activities and processes will be analysed for their actual and, in some cases, potential impact on the objective.

1. Advocacy

20. Given the continued relative neglect of youth and adult literacy in international agendas such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals, the need for advocacy is as great as ever. Increasingly, advocacy messages are grounded in empirical evidence, compiled at national and programme levels, on the impact of literacy acquisition on socio-economic and cultural development and on its empowering effect at the individual and community levels. Advocacy targets national Governments, their development partners, the international donor community and the private sector. Such advocacy is necessary not only in the so-called "developing" countries, but also in advanced economies where functional levels of literacy use may be inadequate for the demands of life and work.

21. Literacy and empowerment was the theme of the United Nations Literacy Decade in the last two years, with a specific focus on women in 2010. This theme was reinforced at the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in June 2010, on the topic of "Gender equality and the empowerment of women". This was an occasion for UNESCO to highlight the current state of women and girls'

[3] See *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010*.

education worldwide, and to determine what needs to be done to achieve gender equality by 2015.

22. As the 2015 deadline approaches, the annual *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010* continues to provide data and analysis of the remaining challenge in basic education. The 2010 title of the report, *Reaching the Marginalized*, highlighted the need to adopt context-sensitive approaches if adequate opportunities for learning are to be available to disadvantaged groups. Language, ethnicity, gender relations, geographical situation and conflict, among other factors, require tailored approaches that mainstream education systems frequently do not offer.

23. China and the Republic of Korea continued to sponsor the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy and the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize, respectively, whose winners and honourable mentions in 2008 and 2009 represented Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, South Africa, the Philippines, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Zambia. These prizes, awarded each year on International Literacy Day (8 September), not only highlight the ongoing challenges of literacy in particular circumstances, but also showcase effective and often inspiring practice. In 2009, the Honorary Ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade, Mrs. Laura Bush, stressed at the literacy prize ceremony that "Literacy is at the core of sustainable solutions to the world's greatest challenges. It provides the foundation for freedom and sustainable economic development". In March 2010, Mrs. Bush hosted the event "Educating and empowering the women and girls of Afghanistan: a conference on education and literacy" in Dallas, Texas, to focus the world's attention on the very low female literacy rate (13 per cent) in that country, showcasing successful actions and discussing the way forward.

24. UNESCO's Special Envoy for Literacy for Development, Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, gave keynote addresses at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, held in December 2009 in Belém, Brazil, and at the Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Education for All, held in June 2010 in Abuja, Nigeria.

25. The Education for All Global Action Week 2009 called on Governments and international agencies, nine years after the adoption of the six Education for All goals, to give serious attention to prioritizing and funding the achievement of Education for All goal 4. Through the "Big Read" event, the Action Week raised awareness of the situation of those for whom literacy remains a closed book. Activities took place in over 100 countries.

26. In Asia, some of the countries participating in the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) made pledges to increase their advocacy efforts, with Pakistan declaring 2010 as National Literacy Year and integrating literacy as a specific strategy in its poverty reduction strategy paper.

27. Various informational and experience-sharing meetings and national media campaigns have been organized to promote an integrated and holistic vision of education, with literacy as a cross-cutting component (for example in Egypt and India) and holistic advocacy plans (Viet Nam).

2. Policy formulation

28. Over the period 2008-2010, a number of countries facing big challenges in youth and adult literacy have adopted new, clearer and stronger policies or plans to increase their literacy efforts. In 2009, India, which has the largest absolute number of non-literate people in the world, adopted an ambitious new programme *Saakshar Bharat* (Literate India) to reach 70 million people in the next three years, with a focus on women and disadvantaged populations. China's 2010 medium and long-term education reform and development plan outline, developed through extensive consultations, stresses the right of all citizens to receive education and focuses on marginalized and vulnerable groups, with a commitment to lifelong learning as a key policy goal. In 2010 Nigeria announced a new national literacy initiative, "Revitalizing adult and youth literacy and non-formal education", aimed at fast-tracking the achievement of Education for All goal 4 by 2015.

29. Within the framework of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, technical assistance was provided to a number of countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea and Mozambique, with regard to the formulation or improvement of national literacy policies, strategies and action plans. Similar support was provided to India from June to September 2009 for the elaboration of its new literacy framework and the above-mentioned *Saakshar Bharat* scheme. Further activities in this area include reviewing existing literacy and non-formal education policies and strategies, developing guidelines for reform and revision, including the necessary technical support for inclusion of literacy and non-formal education in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks. During 2008-2010, various preliminary planning and policy review forums have been organized (including in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Eritrea, Grenada, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Mongolia, Morocco and Papua New Guinea), and diagnostic studies prepared and validated (for example, Djibouti and Viet Nam).

30. The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education offered the opportunity to carry out a thorough assessment of adult literacy in Member States. The 154 national reports on the state of adult education submitted by Member States represented a major contribution to the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade. The reports reviewed the current state of literacy in each country, presented selected innovations and made recommendations on how to achieve the goals of the Decade, in general, and Education for All goals 3 (life skills) and 4 (adult literacy) in particular. During all five regional preparatory meetings in preparation for the Conference, cross-regional exchange was carried out on literacy achievement within and beyond the Decade. In addition, a thematic meeting on sustainable literacy was organized in the run-up to the Conference. At all of the meetings, literacy attracted special attention, and each of the regional outcome documents adopted at each meeting expressed a new resolve to take action in this area:

(a) In the **Africa region**, for example, the importance of promoting mother tongues was emphasized. This should be achieved through policy or by increasing the supply of materials needed to sustain literacy, numeracy and a culture of lifelong learning. A conducive, post-basic literacy environment should be supported by effective publishing and library policies, including subsidizing reading materials for new readers;

(b) The **Arab States** confirmed their commitment to achieving the Education for All goals set out in Dakar, especially those relating to literacy and adult education, as well as the goals of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment. In addition, they recommended that an Arab fund be set up to provide financial assistance to poor countries with high illiteracy rates;

(c) The **Asia and Pacific region** underscored the pressing need to expand adult access to literacy and learning, with agreement that urgent action and significant financial investment are required to combat marginalization, poverty and unemployment;

(d) The **European region** insisted on the need to recognize the crucial importance of literacy, language, numeracy, social, information and communications technology (ICT) and technical and vocational education and training competences within lifelong learning strategies, ensuring that adult learning and education programmes reflect the Education for All goals and the objectives of the United Nations Literacy Decade;

(e) **Latin America and the Caribbean** recommended approaches that strengthen and guarantee lifelong learning, including literacy and basic education, and the promotion of a culture of reading and writing as the basis for literate environments, with the goal of overcoming inequality and poverty in the region and fostering alternative forms of development.

3. Assessment, monitoring and evaluation

31. Ensuring effective planning and the provision of adequate access to literacy programmes as well as the quality of literacy learning required the availability of various kinds of information. Relevant, reliable and timely data are required to: (a) assess the real size of the literacy challenge, levels of literacy of the population and the population's learning needs; (b) monitor progress made in literacy under current programmes compared to policy objectives; (c) evaluate programme outcomes to ensure that their objectives have been reached; and (d) demonstrate the benefits and impact of literacy for improved social and economic opportunities.

32. New measures of literacy focus on different levels of competence and the applied use of skills in everyday life, rather than only counting those skills attached at school or through literacy programmes. The past two years have seen continued expansion of literacy assessment methods to test how far learners can actually use their literacy competencies, whether acquired at school as children or in non-formal programmes as adults. The developmental work for the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme, coordinated by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, has been completed. The Programme, which has been tried out in El Salvador, Jordan, Mongolia, Morocco, Niger, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Paraguay and Viet Nam, offers both a revised approach for measuring reading and numeracy skills as well as a set of instruments for doing so and allows researchers to arrive at a more nuanced and sound assessment of levels of actual literacy skills.

33. Within the framework of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, China has recently completed an analysis and needs assessment of literacy status. The findings of this in-depth situation analysis have fed into recommendations for key strategies to accelerate literacy efforts and the preparation of a LIFE country support plan. Mongolia conducted an assessment of non-formal education, identifying key

priorities and policy changes necessary to enhance its quality and coverage. In addition, studies have been carried out on gender inequality among the illiterate population and on the literacy level of national minority groups. Technical assistance was provided for national literacy surveys and national data collection (including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and regional consultations on literacy and data collection on non-formal education were held in Africa.

34. Relevant, reliable and sustainable information and statistics are required to underpin the systematic monitoring of programmes and the measurement of progress towards policy goals, thus enabling policymakers and programme managers to improve the planning and delivery of programmes. Realizing that need, more countries have focused attention on initiating a non-formal education management information system, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Papua New Guinea and Senegal. UNESCO has developed a handbook and a prototype database and has been providing technical support and capacity development for the setting up of such systems. Countries that will be starting the process are Cambodia, Chad, Mauritania, Rwanda and Togo. In some countries (Bangladesh and Viet Nam for example), the focus was on community-based management information systems. In 2009 UNESCO produced and disseminated a guidebook on the development of a community learning centre — management information system. China has strengthened its literacy supervision and monitoring system whereby higher-level government bodies evaluate the performance of those at lower levels in order to ensure that literacy targets have been met.

4. Partnerships

35. Following the consultation on the International Strategic Framework for Action for the Decade in January 2009, a number of partners made commitments to cooperate in furthering the cause of literacy. Two United Nations agencies (the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP)) indicated that they would leverage their comparative advantage in United Nations coordination and school feeding, respectively, to support literacy policy and action. Four civil society organizations, ActionAid, the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education, the International Reading Association and the European Association for the Education of Adults, expressed their commitment to engage more vigorously in advocacy and capacity development for literacy. The Organización de los Estados Iberoamericanos pledged to increase cooperation with all relevant partners in the United Nations system and civil society to support greater efforts in literacy through their network. From the private sector, the Microsoft Corporation expressed a desire to cooperate in literacy and appointed a senior staff member as the Microsoft Champion of Literacy.

36. The Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Education for All reinforced mutual cooperation among the nine high-population countries and with UNESCO and committed the countries to a substantial series of meetings, workshops and virtual exchanges on literacy issues over the next three years. It is expected that this partnership will attract the attention of other countries to literacy issues of common concern.

37. Using the framework of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment as a coordinating mechanism, United Nations agencies (UNESCO, the United Nations

Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO)) have been brought together under the leadership of the Education Ministry in Afghanistan to promote literacy through three collaborative programmes, developed using the comparative advantage of each partner.

38. The newly approved (2010) strategy of WFP underpins its role in promoting literacy, which takes two distinct forms: its school feeding programmes make it possible for numbers of children to learn without suffering from hunger (22 million children across 75 countries in 2009), and literacy and numeracy training targets adolescents (above the age of 12) who are not in school.

39. In 2010, for the first time, the 10 members of the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organization addressed literacy collectively, on the basis of the three priorities of the Decade's International Strategic Framework for Action, with a view to mutual support and a consistent approach to planning.

40. The French *Agence Nationale de Lutte contre l'Illettrisme* reinforced its commitment to literacy throughout the French-speaking countries through two conferences, one on the theme of sustainable literacy in preparation for the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, and the other, in 2010, on sharing effective practices in reinforcing literacy competencies.

41. In 2010, a new partnership between UNESCO and the United States of America is in preparation that aims at addressing gender inequalities in literacy provision, with an emphasis on increasing learning opportunities for girls and women in formal and non-formal ways.

B. Strategic objective B: To reinforce effective literacy programme delivery

42. Four strategies were adopted under objective B: increasing the scale and quality of delivery, enriching literate environments, capacity development in all aspects of literacy and at all levels and research. In addition, this section will look at ways of learning from and sharing effective practices in literacy.

1. Scale and quality of delivery

43. The nine high-population countries of the global South, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan, face a particular challenge of scaling up to reach large numbers of non-literate people. Girls, female adolescents and women constitute a high proportion of this population, and focus on them has increased. India's new programme "*Saakshar Bharat*" targets 60 million women out of the total target population of 70 million. UNICEF-supported alternative learning centres in Nepal enable out-of-school children to acquire basic skills — over 66 per cent of these children are girls.

44. The nine above-mentioned countries, and other countries, also face questions on how to decentralize the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of literacy programmes. An Asia-Pacific workshop on this topic in 2009 resulted in a guide in this crucial area.

45. More than half of the 35 countries engaged in the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment are in Africa, where a midterm review was carried out in March 2010. The skills of more than 150 managers, specialists and practitioners working in the area of literacy provision were reinforced. This was achieved by sharing effective approaches to strengthen national commitment; mobilizing resources, reaching and integrating disadvantaged groups; improving the quality of literacy and life-skills programmes; promoting literate environments in rural areas; and assessing learning achievements, impacts and programmes. The review also assessed progress made with regard to efforts to link literacy and life-skills to development goals, gender mainstreaming and other cross-cutting issues such as poverty, migration, HIV prevention and climate change. The review demonstrated that the Initiative continues to be an effective framework for collaboration, advocacy and technical support. In addition, the review recommended that more resources be mobilized in the participating countries, and by UNESCO, in order to advance literacy in most African countries.

46. Reaching populations not well served by the mainstream school system often means establishing accelerated learning tracks for adolescents and young people, enabling them to re-enter the formal system at an appropriate level or obtain a qualification equivalent to primary schooling. Angola, Malawi and Pakistan have adopted such approaches, with the support of UNICEF, and others (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia) have done so by creating accreditation mechanisms, focusing on bridges to the formal system for disadvantaged groups.

47. Easy access to literacy learning is facilitated by using the mother tongue of learners, most frequently structured within a multilingual approach that gives access, at a second stage, to other languages that learners wish to acquire. Both school-based and non-formal literacy learning increasingly take this approach. UNICEF promotes mother tongue-based multilingual education in three states in India. In January 2010, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, in cooperation with UNESCO, produced guidelines for the integration of African languages and cultures into education in African countries. In the Asia/Pacific region, mother tongue-based literacy was improved through evaluations in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand. Efforts to address language issues in literacy were given a boost by the United Nations International Year of Languages, whose 2009 report noted new initiatives in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Viet Nam to use minority/indigenous languages for literacy learning.

48. Literacy is an essential part of bridging the digital divide, and countries continue to explore the use of ICT in literacy in two ways: as a means of learning, and as an important application of literacy. To that end, ICT learning tools have been developed in Bangladesh, China and Pakistan. In Pakistan a non-governmental organizations also used mobile phones and texting as learning tools. Training material for ICT-based literacy provision has been developed in India.

49. The strategy of developing community learning centres continued to gain in popularity during the reporting period, offering a means of strengthening community participation and ownership of literacy programmes and of linking literacy learning with the acquisition of other locally relevant vocational and technical skills. A large number of countries offer community-based literacy programmes through the centres, which, increasingly, are providing a platform for

lifelong learning. In Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has established such centres with a focus on post-literacy and life skills training that target marginalized populations and women in geographically isolated areas. Nepal conducted an interim assessment of the programmes, and participatory research was conducted in 23 countries to determine their effectiveness in providing literacy and continuing education. Findings were shared at a regional meeting in Indonesia in 2009. In this regard, Timor-Leste has focused on setting minimum guidelines, producing materials for vocational skills and expanding coverage, while in Bangladesh the centres are being developed as delivery mechanisms for lifelong learning, including education for sustainable development.

2. Creating a literate environment and sustaining literacy

50. In some countries with poorly stocked literate environments, newly literate people have little opportunity to practise and sustain their competencies. Specific programmes have increased the focus on the production of such materials (in Afghanistan, India, Madagascar and Malawi) and on making them easily available, for example through local reading rooms and libraries (China), or in more general ways. Other countries have tackled the same issue by integrating relevant topics and lifeskills (for example, gender, sustainable development and HIV/AIDS prevention) into the literacy curriculum (Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan). Post-literacy materials produced by UNESCO, particularly on gender and on HIV/AIDS, continue to be in demand and have been translated into indigenous languages in both Ethiopia and Madagascar.

51. In 2010, UNESCO entered into a partnership with the United States to develop "open educational resources" for literacy programmes. These resources are learning materials that can be freely used and modified by teachers and students. The tools are typically delivered electronically and can also be accessed offline, enabling a more rapid transfer of best practices in pedagogy.

3. Capacity development

52. Key national stakeholder meetings for needs assessment for capacity development at various levels have been organized in a number of countries and needs assessment studies have been undertaken (including in Chad, China, Eritrea, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Yemen). At both the regional and country levels, countries have received support in building institutional, administrative and professional capacity for literacy.

53. The capacity of educators and teachers, in both formal and non-formal programmes, is critical to effective learning and is receiving focused attention from Governments and international partners in Bolivia, China, Madagascar and Mongolia. In Mongolia, training at national level reaches 50 educators annually. In 2009, in cooperation with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), adult literacy in multilingual contexts was strengthened through a cross-regional workshop organized in Addis Ababa, which was attended by 50 specialists in literacy and non-formal education from Asia and the Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa and Arab States. In 2010, the Ministry of Basic Education of Niger and UNESCO organized a workshop for national adult literacy and non-formal education specialists from the *Centre de formation des cadres de l'alphabétisation* in order to develop a curriculum and modules for the training of

literacy trainers. Training sessions were also conducted in Guinea, Gabon and Senegal (training for trainers of literacy facilitators) as well as in Bangladesh (HIV/AIDS prevention linked to literacy provision); training materials were prepared (e.g. in Nepal and China for training for literacy provision through community learning centres).

54. Using generic guides produced at the regional level and other resources, countries produced their own frameworks for the training of literacy and non-formal education facilitators and managers (Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia).

55. Given the large literacy needs in the nine high-population countries of the global South, the China-based International Institute for Rural Education, with its local and international partners, boosted the capacities of 70 literacy specialists, equipping them to analyse and design strategies for literacy and adult learning in rural areas. The seminar also provided an opportunity to review the progress made in literacy and adult education within the framework of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, the United Nations Literacy Decade and Education for All in eight countries participating in the Initiative.

56. In addition, 10 countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania) received assistance in refining national literacy policies and strategies and in training senior and middle-level literacy and non-formal education personnel in: curricular and materials development; the assessment of ongoing delivery schemes such as the community learning centres in Nepal; advocacy; training and monitoring systems; research; and ways of strengthening literate environments.

4. Research

57. In the area of educational research, where there is relatively little research into youth and adult literacy, the collection and analysis of evidence for policymaking and programme design, experimentation with innovative approaches and the systematic evaluation of outcomes and impact are limited in number and scope. This concern is increasingly being voiced, however, as evidenced by a number of positive developments over the reporting period.

58. In Bangladesh, the *Bangladesh Education Journal* published a contribution to a researcher's forum on new educational policies and policy dialogue.

59. In 2009, the University of East Anglia brought researchers together to examine approaches to literacy inequalities, for which the United Nations Literacy Decade gave a framework for addressing both theoretical and programmatic concerns in promoting literacy opportunities.

60. A multi-country research project (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Niger and Senegal) was launched by UNESCO in 2009, with a focus on developing tools for measuring the learning outcomes of youth and adults participating in literacy programmes.

61. During 2010, along with the ongoing sharing of effective practices in literacy through web-based platforms, UNESCO initiated the development of the "Knowledge and Innovations Network for Literacy", which aims to support the vision of a literate world "through the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge, and by innovation, advocacy and brokering connections between

research, policy and practice". Operating virtually, it will provide a platform for cooperative research and action among the community of literacy thinkers and practitioners worldwide.

62. As an output from the earlier (2007-2008) series of regional literacy conferences, UNESCO initiated a new series entitled *Emerging Trends in Literacy*, the first four volumes of which are due to appear in late 2010. The collection, which includes commissioned work, focuses on policies, assessment, monitoring and evaluation, programme delivery and the literate environment.

C. Strategic objective C: To harness new resources for literacy

63. Despite some positive trends, funding for literacy is far from being sufficient to achieve universal literacy. The financial crisis poses a very real challenge to education budgets and international funding for education, with a possible negative effect on spending for literacy programmes.

1. Government funding

64. Youth and adult literacy is mainly funded by Governments. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, Government funding is the source most frequently mentioned for literacy and non-formal education, although non-governmental organizations also invest strongly, and donor funds may provide additional support. Senegal is exceptional: 93 per cent of the funding for adult literacy comes from external resources.[4]

65. The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education reaffirmed the recommendation set out in the Belem Framework of Action, to "seek investment of at least 6 per cent of GNP in education and work towards increased investment in adult learning and education". The Global Campaign for Education has promoted the benchmark of allocating at least 3 per cent of the national education budget to adult literacy.[5] Very few countries meet the 6 per cent recommendation. The Nordic countries, however, provide a positive example: public spending on education amounts to 7 to 8 per cent of GNP per country.[4] In the national reports of Germany and Hungary to the Sixth International Conference it was noted that adult education receives, respectively, 1.05 per cent and 1 per cent of GDP. Owing to different standards of measurements (the share of GNP versus GDP) these figures should be read with care.

66. There are positive signs in some countries that funding for literacy programmes has recently increased. China, for example, increased its annual funding for literacy from $1.2 million to $7.4 million during the period 2007-2010. Nigeria increased the funding for the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education from $0.36 million in 2007 to $11.1 million in 2010. In Brazil, the federal Government increased its investment in the "Literate Brazil" programme by 27 per cent between 2008 and 2009. India has made $1.2 billion available for the *Saakshar Bharat* programme for the years from 2009 to 2012.[6]

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[4] See Aitchison and Alidou, in *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, 2009.

[5] Global Benchmarks for Literacy, Global Campaign for Education/ActionAid International, 2005.

[6] See Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Education for All 2010, Abuja (unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001885/188530e.pdf) country reports.

However, the national reports for the Sixth International Conference show that the long-term trends in public spending on adult education are mostly mixed, increasing in some years, decreasing in others. Pakistan reported to the Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Education for All that within its five-year plans the share of literacy allocations has oscillated between 1 and 8.6 per cent, meaning that there is very little predictable financing for adult education and literacy in the long term.[4]

67. The total share of the education budget allocated to adult literacy falls far below the recommended level of 3 per cent. Many countries spend only about 1 per cent of their education budget on adult literacy (see table 4), a level which government providers concede falls far short of the necessary resources. Nigeria, for example, considers poor funding at all levels of government as one of the most serious constraints in fighting illiteracy. Pakistan also admits that funds for adult literacy "have remained severely inadequate".[7] Both the lack of funding and its unpredictability undermine the sustainable planning of literacy education, seriously hampering the progress in achieving literacy.

Table 4
Share of allocation for adult literacy in selected national education budgets

Country	*Share of allocation (percentage)*	*Year*
Chad	0.96	2007
Guatemala	less than 1	annually
Mozambique	3 (literacy and adult education)	2006-2007
Nepal	1.13 (literacy and non-formal education)	2005-2006
Pakistan	0.74	1998-2003
Rwanda	0.50	2008
Senegal	0.70	2008
Yemen	1.4 (literacy and adult education)	2007

Source: national reports prepared for the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education.

2. Funding by bilateral and multilateral organizations

68. The achievement of universal primary education has been the dominant focus of donor funding over the past years. The Education for All "Fast Track Initiative" exclusively supports Education for All goal 2 (primary education and the gender dimension of goal 5), except in a very few cases where governments insisted on including adult literacy in their submissions to the Initiative. It does not give priority to funding any non-formal education or second-chance education for youth or adults to acquire basic education equivalent to universal primary education.[4] In 2010, however, action by the Education for All Board for the Initiative opened the door to more holistic funding of the six Education for All goals — a positive development for the funding of adult literacy.

[7] Ibid., Nigeria and Pakistan country reports.

69. WFP, for example, spent at least $67 million on food for training activities that support literacy and numeracy in 2008.[8] The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment has been successful in mobilizing funds for literacy, and in several countries, multilateral agencies and bilateral donors have provided resources within the framework of that Initiative, in particular the Nordic countries through its Capacity-building for Education for All Programme. For example, in 2008, the programme for the enhancement of literacy in Afghanistan was launched by UNESCO and the Afghan Ministry of Education. Afghanistan received a grant of $35 million from the Government of Japan for a literacy programme that will benefit around 300,000 learners.

70. In 2009, within the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, UNESCO provided Iraq with technical support for its project on capacity-building in literacy provision, funded by Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned, First Lady of Qatar and UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education. The European Union, with UNESCO as technical partner, is funding parts of the Moroccan literacy project, which is part of the Capacity-building for Education for All Programme. Since 2009, assistance has been provided to refining national literacy policies and training non-formal education personnel in 10 countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania) through extrabudgetary funding.

3. Private and civil society funding sources

71. Private organizations and non-governmental organizations provide an important complementary funding source for literacy programmes. In the Arab region, for example, civil society organizations devise their own literacy programmes.[4] Public-private partnerships are emerging as a trend in the field of funding adult literacy. In India, for example, Tata Consultancy Services has launched a computer-based literacy programme.

4. Impact of the financial crisis

72. In order to achieve the literacy target alone, $2.5 billion will be needed every year until 2015. This demands a great effort in scaling up resources. The financial crisis seriously threatens to undermine this effort, as shown in the analysis contained in the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (2010) on the potential impact of the financial crisis on education spending. According to a preliminary survey conducted by UNESCO, countries are making efforts to protect their education budgets, although in some cases cuts are foreseen. While overall development aid has been rising over the past years, large financing gaps for basic education remain, and aid commitments are slowing down. Since official development assistance (ODA) is defined in relation to gross national income (GNI) and economic growth is projected to slow down, this may have a damaging impact on the amount of aid provided. If the share of education in overall aid remains as it was in 2007, this could lead to a shortfall of $890 million in aid for education from European donors in 2010. If the share of expenditure invested in education remains the same, the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* projects that the funds available for education in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, could fall by $4.6 billion a year, on average, in 2009 and 2010. Based on this scenario, the financial crisis is likely to

[8] World Food Programme, Annual Performance Report 2008 (WFP/EB.A/2009/4).

have a negative impact on external support for literacy programmes. Egypt, for example, has reported that the crisis has an impact on the general budget for literacy. While the budget grew by 2.5 per cent in 2008, it only increased by 0.3 per cent in 2009.[9]

IV. Future action and challenges: 2012 and beyond

73. The United Nations Literacy Decade has just over two years left to run: it is urgent to further scale up efforts and to consider the post-2012 strategy for addressing the youth and adult literacy challenges. In pursuit of the overall objectives of the Decade and the specific priorities established for the remaining years, the following elements are essential to guide current work and inform priorities for the future:

(a) **Sustained political commitment**: two principles underlie sustained political commitment to literacy for youth and adults: first, literacy as an essential and integral part of the right to education which every person should enjoy; second, the links between literacy and human, socio-economic and cultural development. Without a clear commitment to both principles, certain sections of the population will continue to be neglected in national and international educational policies and strategies;

(b) **Literacy for development**: there is general agreement that literacy is not a stand-alone skill or technique. Literacy is only as valuable as the purposes that people use it for. Thus there is a move away from literacy learning as a process of spelling out words on a page towards a more functional concept of literacy — for personal and community empowerment, for improved livelihoods, for a better quality of life. Literacy learning must be embedded in the learning of other skills, so that the focus from the start is on how learners will use literacy in their lives. This is not merely an economic issue, but also one of social participation and voice, using literacy to express oneself and one's identity, to take part in social and democratic processes, to play a full part in society. The implications are that literacy learning focuses on the learner and her/his patterns of communication, socio-economic circumstances and cultural identity;

(c) **Scaling up quality literacy efforts**: based on projections of current rates of progress, the number of non-literate adults in the world is estimated to be reduced only by about 10 per cent by 2015. There is no room for business as usual — it is quite clear that current efforts will not meet the challenge. Scaling up will necessarily involve a much larger investment, backed by strong and sustained political commitment, explicit policies and feasible, large-scale implementation strategies. This will also require learning the lessons of effective practice and applying them in new contexts. Literacy programmes for youth and adults cannot simply be replicated, however successful they may be — context, culture, language, purpose and motivation are all critical factors. Planning to scale up must address the complexity and diversity of learners' lives and circumstances — there is no short cut to quality learning;

[9] See Egypt, country report, for the Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Education for All (see unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001885/188530e.pdf).

(d) **International partnerships**: the United Nations Literacy Decade has raised the profile of literacy on various national, regional and international agendas, but it has not resulted in strong international partnerships, either within the United Nations system or among the donor/funding community. As the Decade moves into its final phase, and as the 2015 target date for achieving the Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals nears, it is urgent to develop stronger international partnerships in support of literacy efforts at national level. A higher international profile will do much to boost political commitment and greater resources;

(e) **Funding**: there are several positive trends that are at risk owing to the financial and economic crisis, although Governments are expressing strong determination to maintain literacy, and education more broadly, as national budget priorities. However, almost everywhere, the literacy challenge outstrips the means. Thus, literacy provision will continue to require increased resources from Governments and communities, as well as stronger support from development partners. The overarching frameworks of the Decade and the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, as well as the Millennium Development Goals, and the Education for All goals, provide well-tried channels for scaling up funding;

(f) **Literacy and the Millennium Development Goals**: the Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Education for All stressed the critical importance of literacy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals by addressing the following message to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, to be held in September 2010:

> The E-9 countries, representing 54 per cent of the world's population and 67 per cent of the world's non-literates, lay emphasis on the following principles in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals:
>
> - The Millennium Development Goals, individually and as a whole, cannot be achieved without education and the fulfilment of all six Education for All goals, ensuring that every society becomes a learning society where individuals and communities are equipped to adopt and adapt change in their lives;
> - Literacy, as an indispensable learning tool and key indicator of quality education, must be vigorously promoted, inside and outside of school systems, for every child, adolescent, young person and adult.
>
> We urge the Heads of State and of Government to make youth and adult literacy a priority investment for achieving all the Millennium Development Goals.